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Earnest and Compassionate

Suit for Forbearance :

TO THE

LEARNED WRITERS

OF SOME

Controversies at present.

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*By a Melancholly Stander-by.*

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—Knowing that they do gender Strifes, 2 Tim. II. 23.

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L O N D O N,

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## An Earnest and Compassionate Suit for Forbearance, &c.

**T**HERE is not a greater Blemish to the *Reformation* than the *Open Dissensions* of its *Professors* ; nor amongst Men that are *Serious in Religion*, a *frequenter*, or perhaps a *more scandalous Sin*.

The *Mischief* hereby to *Religion* in *Common*, as well as in *Special* to *our Church*, is so *notorious*, so much complained of by all sorts, and lamented by the true *Mourners in Sion*, that it need not here be represented, but shall be taken for confest.

Now, nothing certainly has begot more *Dissensions* than the *urging too strict* an *Union* : Were *Christianity* left in that *Latitude* and *Simplicity*, wherein it was delivered by *Our Lord* and his *Apostles* (and it is hard to assign sufficient *Reasons* why it should not be so left) our *Controversies* would be reduced to

a very *small Compass*, if not totally cease.

He who considers the Summ of *Christian Doctrine*, as it now ordinarily stands in the Church, and compares it with the *Faith* once delivered to the *Saints*, will scarcely forbear censuring the *School-Doctors* to have been *worse Enemies* to Christianity, than either the *Heathen Philosophers* or *persecuting Emperors*. The Evil which those unlucky Wits have introduc'd, has been received into the Bowels, and affects the very Vitals of our Christianity; insomuch, that it is likely to stick not only closer, but longer to the Church than any other Darts that have wounded it. And 'tis sad to think, that that very Branch of the Church, from whence, above any other, Healing might be expected, is now tearing the Wound wider.

The *First Reformers* frequently and passionately complain of this Plague, and earnestly endeavoured, as well as desired, a *Purer and more Scriptural sort of Divinity*. They made great progress therein. The *forreign part* of the Reformation, tho' they retained sundry *Scholaſtick Cramping Terms* in their *Institutions* and *common Places*, or *Systems*, yet banish'd them out of their *Publick Prayers*: And it were to be wished the Church of *England* had used the *same Temper*. Certainly we  
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may worship God right well, yea, most acceptably, in Terms of his own stamp or coinage.

But, pleading for Alterations in our Liturgy, is not the Matter I concern my self in at present : The summ of what I now urge and would perswade, is, That *Our Doctors* would so far *hold their Hands*, that the People may be able to use with *due Reverence* such Passages in our *Liturgy*, wherein the scholastical terms hinted at do occur : which I do avow, if some men proceed, will soon be rendred Ridiculous, even amongst the Common People, who are neither so blind, nor haply so ductil as in former days. Many a Contradiction (yea, scurvy biting Reproaches sometimes) do wise men receive, which yet they dissemble, or seem to take no notice of ; and by this means the *Jest*, as we say, is *spoiled* ; *Convitia spreta exolescunt*. I am well assured some late Pamphlets had dyed away, or been now in few mens Hands, had not divers Persons of great Names, and deservedly of no less esteem in the Church, taken on themselves the labour to confute them ; which in the Judgment of some it is to be wish'd they had done without running into those very Absurdities, to which the Adversary would reduce them. It seems to me but  
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an *awkward* though *ordinary Art*, us'd by many who now-adays deeply engage in Controversies, that when they are pinch'd with Difficulties, they *advance Solutions* and *Positions*, the necessary *Consequents* of which they will, as in the same Breath, *deny* (I am loth to assign fresh and particular Instances.) But how Honourable this is before Men of Reason, or what it advantageth any Cause before Indifferent Judges, I leave to consideration. It can certainly be no Pleasure to a Man, to find himself entangled in the most curious Net-work of his own knitting; however admirable the Make thereof once seemed to himself or his too-easie Friends.

The *Controversie* now of late *revived*, and so hotly agitated at present, has been above Thirteen Hundred Years ago *determined* by two General Councils, (the *Nicene* and first *Constantinopolitan*) both which are highly owned, and have been ever adhered to by this our Church: The *Creed* made up betwixt them, stands in our *Liturgy*; and their *Determinations* have been *ratified* by *succeeding General Councils*. Why cannot we let the Matter stand upon this Bottom of *Authority*? Those who are vers'd in the History of that Council, may be pleas'd to remember, *what* were the

the Arguments urged, and, that it was Authority chiefly carried the Point. 'Tis true indeed, there are more hard Terms introduced into the Church-Doctrin, even since that Council, which Use has now made old: But, *let us stop somewhere*; Why should we be still moving the *Ancient Bounds*?

To be together plain and succinct; Give me Leave to say, Of all the Controversies we can touch upon at present, this of the *Trinity* is the most *Unreasonable*, the most *Dangerous*, and so the most *Unseasonable*.

It is (1<sup>st</sup>.) the most unreasonable Controversie in the World, and that on several accounts.

*First*, Because it is on all hands confest, the Deity is *infinite*, *unsearchable*, *incomprehensible*; and yet every one, who pretends to write plainer than another on this Controversie, professes to make all comprehensible and *easy*. A man would think it a small Favour to request of Persons of Learning, that they would be consistent with, and not contradict themselves.

Again; This Matter has been *sufficiently determined*, and by *due Authority* (if any Ecclesiastical Authority can be such) is *settled* already. The  
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Councils of *Nice* and *Constantinople*, as before said, and *many other Councils* since confirming the same, have done what Authority can do in it. And when we have moved every Stone, *Authority must define it*. Our Church-Articles insist in the same Track; and we profess our selves, at least for Peace-sake, bound thereby.

Moreover, the *present Issue shews*, that in this World it never will be better understood: What Stuff has the Master of the Sentences, in his First Book, and upon him all the Scholastick Wits, with their too-much Subtilties, and too-nice Enquiries made of it? And now afresh, some by endeavouring to explicate more intelligibly the Quiddity (as I may so speak) of each person by himself, and the Unity of all Three between themselves (or to use a more Orthodox Phrase, in one Essence) have, by such Endeavours of speaking more plainly, spoke only more adventurously and dangerously. O that all who advance new Notions, would look forward to their Consequences! I forbear Particulars; but this Consideration makes me say yet farther.

That as far as I can perceive, the more men draw the Disputacious Saw, the more perplex'd and intricate this Question is; at least, that Truth which  
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is contended for, is farther off from being settled : For the *New Attempts* still in the Issue not *satisfying* the *Old Difficulties*, men look upon them to be what well they may, *unsatisfiable* or insoluble, and impute not this to the *Depth of the Mystery*, but to the *Absurdities of the Hypothesis*, which by the same means becomes still more involv'd.

And *Lastly*, Hereby our Church at present is, and the *Common Christianity* (it may be feared) will be more and more daily *exposed* to *Atheistical Men*; for, this being but the Result of the former particulars, and such kind of men daily growing upon us, it cannot be believed, they can overlook the Advantage which is so often given them.

On these accounts, as well as others, this Controversie (2dly.) is the most *dangerous*, as well as unreasonable. The Danger hereof is especially hence evident, in that the *Doctrin of the Blessed Trinity*, or of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose Names we, and all Christians are, or ought to have been baptized, is esteem'd as it is, if duly stated, one of the *Fundamentals of Christian Religion*: Now, to litigate, touching a Fundamental, is to turn it into a Contro-

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versie; that is, to unsettle, at least endanger the unsettling, the whole Superstructure.

And, to add no more Arguments, I say finally, That as indeed all Controversies amongst Protestants are most *unseasonable*, in *such a Juncture*, wherein, under God, nothing but an *Union of Counsels*, and joyning Hands and Hearts, can *preserve the Reformation*, and scarce any thing more *credit and justifie it*, than an *Union in Doctrinals*, so above all other Controversies, none can well be thought of *worse timed* than this. What *Reproach* does it bring *upon us*, and what *Sport* does it create our *Roman Adversaries*, that the Protestants of *England* are now disputing the Doctrin of the *Trinity*: *Their Divisions* (say they) *can never stop*: 'Tis no wonder they quarrel touching their King, they are now divided touching their *G O D*.

But it will be said, What shall we do? Shall we tamely, by a base silence, give up the Point?

I answer, There is *no danger* of it. The *Establish'd Church* is in *possession* of it, and *Dispute* will only encrease the *Disturbance*: The *Adversaries* to the received Doctrin cannot *Alter our Articles of Religion*, but they can *Dispute everlastingly*: They are men *subtile, sober, industrious*; many of them very *virtuous*, and (as all must say) *setting*

ting aside this Opinion, Devout, Pious, and Charitable. They have a Zeal too, no *less ardent* than that of *Church-men*: And Presses, at home or abroad, are and ever will be open; so that they will never be silent. An Answer will only breed a Reply, that a Rejoinder, that a Triplication, and so *in infinitum*. I say then, as before, *neglect them*, till a fit Time and Place, and then let that be done which shall be judged most Christian, and most wholesom.

And, to prepare a Way towards the laying to an *Eternal Sleep* this and such-like Controversies, I ingeniously profess my self not to see, how it will ever be proved reasonable to require from any men more than a *Negative Belief* of such *Mysteries*, which they *cannot understand*. By a Negative Belief I mean *something more*, perhaps, than a meer *Επιχειρημα*, or *suspending a Man's Judgment*, viz. An *Agreeing so far to a thing*, as not to contradict it, or teach contrary to it. Now, though I may not *practise* what I am not satisfied is *Lawful*, yet I am not bound to *contradict* all things which I am *not satisfied to be True*; nay, not always those things which I am *perswaded to be False*. Where therefore there is no Practice imposed contrary to Mens Judgments, in such Controversies they may be

required quietly to *acquiesce* in the *Publick Determination*, and even without such injunction, I think, for Peace sake, truly they ought: But to require Men to *practise contrary* to what they *can understand to be True*, I think, is *iniquitous*; or (which is much the same) *uncharitable*: It is not what we would have imposed upon our selves. Now, after proposal of the clearest Arguments we have, if Men shall still avow they understand not such things to be true, and assign considerable Reasons for such their Avowry, for my own part, I know not why we should not believe them to be dissatisfied, when they constantly protest they are; especially since they themselves best know, and it is impossible for us to know the contrary, till we can know their Hearts. Let *those men* therefore be *Silent*: and till we can satisfy them (which, for ought I can see, will not be till we can make things plain which are confessedly unsearchable, if not, as some pretend, unintelligible) let *not us* impose a Practice upon them contrary to their Sense, especially seeing we are agreed in the other parts of our *Common Christianity*.

But, for *present Union*, how shall such Injunctions, which impose the Orthodox Doctrin (admitting them to be Laws) be superseded?

Ido

I do conceive very much, if not full enough, is done already by the late *Act* in favour of *Dissenters*, and I acquiesce in the *Authority* that pass'd it, as plenary enough to relax more, if necessary. I cannot believe the Body of the Bishops disallowed, or did not with good liking consent to that *Act*: Nor do I judge such a *Lower House of Convocation*, as by common Custom of this Realm is made up of the Representatives of all Beneficed Presbyters, is necessary to Authorising every Alteration which shall be made in our *Liturgy* or *Canons*. If this Course had been observ'd in K. Edward the Sixth's time, we had had no Reformed Liturgy, perhaps no Reformation at all. As long as there is a free Synod or Convention of all the Bishops, the Suffrage of fewer Doctors (and those truly Doctors) if the Government please, may amply suffice. And I appeal herein to the Practice of the Primitive and truly Catholick Church; of which, upon occasion, I may say more:

In expectation of some happy Healing Temper, by some such means as this, let us all be quiet, and make use of the Liberty given; pressing each of us no more upon any, than is by Law required; nor being offended with any of our Brethren, for taking the Liberty which the present Relaxation gives;  
and

and then I do not know but all *Conscientious Men* may, in *publick Congregations*, one where or other, *Pray, Hear, and Communicate to their own Hearts content* : But as for *Atheistical and Irreligious men*, that neglect, scoff at, or make it their business to deprave all Religion ; or, as for *such whose Religion* is mostly either their *Gain or Addictedness to their Party and Hypothesis* ; touching both these, I say, we are not to trouble our selves, that they agree not with us ; they will do so, when God shall change their Hearts. Charity and Sweetness are a main part of the new Creature, and for promoting this in them, and in others, we are to use all our Prudence, and our utmost Endeavours, both by Prayer, Doctrin, and any other fit means we can think of : When they have *new Hearts*, they will be *peaceable, or fit to be courted* into Agreement, and not till then. To this Point therefore, namely, *The Mending the Hearts and Lives of Men*, let all our Sermons, all our Writings tend.

I cannot tell, but the *moving farther these Controversies* may blast much of the *Credit and Success* we have had in our late *Controversial Writings* against the *Papists*.

It may be said, Our very Orthodox Men, of the greatest Reputation, have some of them *de-  
ceded* from the *Doctrin* (in this behalf) *formerly  
Taught* even in our own Church.

That which follows was once thought a fair, intelligible, solid, and judicious Explication of this Mystery: "The Substance of GOD, with  
"this Property to be of none, doth make the  
"Person of the Father. The very self-same  
"Substance in number with this Property, to be  
"of the Father, maketh the Person of the Son:  
"The same Substance having added unto it  
"the Property of proceeding from the other  
"two, maketh the Person of the Holy Ghost:  
"So that in every Person there is implied both  
"the Substance of GOD, which is One, and  
"also that Property which causeth the same Per-  
"son really and truly to differ from the other  
"two. The Author of these Words was, in  
his days, *Master of the Temple*, and by the best  
Judgments esteemed, both then and now, to  
have *spoken* as much the Sense of our Church,  
and in this Point of the Catholick Church, as  
any man.

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But other Doctors of Ours, engaging at present in this Controversie; now explain the Mystery thus.

“ The Persons are Three distinct and infinite  
 “ Minds,--Three Intelligent Beings,--Three Holy  
 Spirits : For, according to this Learned Doctor,  
 a Person [ *even in divinis* ] “ is such a Being  
 “ as has Understanding, Will, and Power of  
 “ Action. — These three Infinite Minds are  
 “ distinguished just as three Finite created Minds  
 “ are, by Self-consciousness. — Each Divine  
 “ Person has a Self-consciousness of its own, and  
 “ knows and feels it self as distinct from the  
 “ other Divine Persons. — Yea, — The Fa-  
 “ ther has his own Personal Wisdom, and, by  
 “ Internal Consciousness, all the Wisdom of the  
 “ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The Son has  
 “ his own Personal Wisdom, and by the same  
 “ Consciousness the Wisdom of the Father and  
 “ of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost has  
 “ his own Personal Wisdom, and all the Wis-  
 “ dom of the Father and Son. — The like  
 “ Personal — Goodness and Power have they  
 “ also. — For these are Perfections that may  
 “ be in more than one. — But if either Fi-  
 “ nite



“ nite or Infinite Spirits, Minds, or Persons are  
 “ mutually conscious ; that is, are internally  
 “ and universally conscious to one anothers  
 “ Thoughts, Wills, Actions and Passions ; this  
 “ maketh them to be truly and properly Nu-  
 “ merically one with each other, as much as  
 “ each Spirit is one with himself, —— they are  
 “ hereby united to each other, as every man is  
 “ to himself. —— And thus is it that the Three  
 “ Persons are One God : They are one God,  
 “ and in one another, by Perfect Mutual Con-  
 “ sciousness. I make here neither Comment  
 nor Inference upon this curious Discourse.

Another Doctor of our Church is pleased more tenderly and safely to explain it, thus :

“ The Blessed Trinity is three Somewhats ;  
 “ and these three Somewhats we commonly  
 “ call Persons ; but the true Notion and true  
 “ Name of that Distinction is unknown to us.-----  
 “ The word Persons [ *in Divinis* ] is but meta-  
 “ phorical, not signifying just the same , as  
 “ when applied to Men.—We mean thereby  
 “ no more but somewhat analogous to Persons.

This later part has been ever held to by all Learned Trinitarians ; and the Dr. speaks like himself. Yet it troubles me, what Sport some

People make even with this Explication.

But in fine, thus stands what Improvements Doctors have made on this Great Christian Dogme. Now, were it not much *better* these Doctors had *let it alone*? And that we let it alone, and bend our own, and endeavour to draw other mens Thoughts to the *Practice of plain and unquestionable Devotion and Christian Morals*: For, suppose any people hearing the word *Person*, when applied equally to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be thus *improper*, and that the word *Somewhat* is a *properer* and *clearer* (else certainly so great a Doctor would not have used it as an *Explicatory*) Term, Suppose, I say, some *Hearers* or *Readers* should substitute *Somewhats* in their Prayers, instead of *Persons*, and say, O Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity, *Three Somewhats* and one God, have Mercy on us, &c. Or, To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, *Three Somewhats* and one God, be all Glory, &c. What an excellent Improvement of Devotion must there be hereby? And though we do not verbally thus change the Terms, yet having heard or read them thus explicated, such Explications, while we use those Forms, will be apt to incurr into our Thoughts whether we will or no. So

So that to conclude, I must now desire our Doctors as they are Friends to the Church, and would not expose Her Liturgy, that they would forbear these Controversies, as being not only unprofitable, but corruptive of, and prejudicial or injurious to our common Devotion.

I could say much more on this Subject, and perhaps shall, if what I have here said take not the effect I desire. But I should be very willing to hold my Hand, as I request others to do.

I love Truth with my Soul. Ὁρθοδοξίαν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν. *To take streight Steps to the Truth*, has been long my Vow, and is still my Study: But, I love Peace also, and true Devotion: And we know, he that is the God of Truth, is in like manner the God of Peace, and to be Worship'd with the Devotion of Love, and of a Sound Mind. God encrease this Devotion, and let us endeavour to secure and promote it.

I may err, I will not be turbulent or uncharitable; and to that purpose I will dispute as little as I can. I cannot dissemble, that I wish in this regard all men were of my mind.